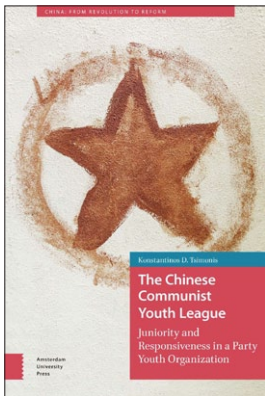


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With more than 81 million members, the Chinese Communist Youth League (CYL) is the largest youth political organisation in the world.¹ *The Chinese Communist Youth League: Juniority and Responsiveness in a Party Youth Organization* is valuable as one of the few books on the topic that have been published in English. While Healy (1982) reviewed the role and activities of the CYL in the first 30 years of the People's Republic of China in *The Chinese Communist Youth League, 1949-1979*, Tsimonis's book is the latest serious attempt to systematically explore the CYL's operation in a context of socioeconomic transformation, especially during the era of former President Hu Jintao. By examining the CYL's policies and activities, as well as the empirical data the author collected from April 2009 to October 2011, the book explores the CYL's main characteristics as a Party-dependent mass organisation and how the CYL engages young people and fosters youth loyalty.

The book is based on an ethnographic method combining interviews and surveys. It consists of six main chapters, plus a relatively short concluding chapter. Chapter One introduces the background of the research and the organisation of the book. It draws on a comprehensive literature review that extensively uses

both non-Chinese and Chinese language sources. Chapter Two develops an analytical framework for the study and raises a new concept of "juniority" that captures the process of conditioning youth as a "junior" political subject. Chapters Three and Four focus on the CYL's operation on campus and in the workplace, and questions the League's responsiveness by using both first- and second-hand data. Chapter Five examines the Central League School's (*tuanyao* 團校) education programmes and its operations at the local level, as well as the national exchange programmes for CYL cadres. Chapter Six investigates the CYL's efforts to promote youth employment, youth infrastructure, and public consultation processes, and finds that those activities have been de-prioritised and exhibits poor results because of their "juniority" status, which gives them limited ability to mobilise "senior" government departments. The book concludes with an appraisal of its main findings and evaluates the CYL's efforts in addressing the demands of its constituency.

Its main merits are threefold. First, the author's arguments are based on solid fieldwork carried out in Beijing, Shanghai, and Zhejiang and Shandong Provinces, and on interviews with 60 informants. In describing his method and presenting empirical evidence, Tsimonis carefully examines the impact of "juniority," which is institutionalised and normalised in the League, and advances the understanding of the CYL's evolution in contemporary China. Second, the book includes substantial scholarly appendices and a well-produced index, offering valuable information that allows readers to gain a better understanding of the research. For example, Appendix Two lists nationwide CYL activities from 1963 to 2007. This information stretching over 28 pages includes each activity's name in Chinese and English translation, the year it was initiated, a description of the content and/or activity, the responsible/leading institution, and the target group(s). Third, the book cites both classical and current references in English and Chinese, demonstrating a comprehensive knowledge of the field. The literature review is informed by a historical sense that demonstrates how current policies under President Xi Jinping are built on the foundations of the past.

Overall, the scholarship of the book is adequate. However, the book has a few limitations. Firstly, since the author's examination of the CYL gives paradigmatic emphasis to qualitative research, it seems appropriate to incorporate a reflexive account into the research. The current version could then benefit from addressing the researcher's reflexivity. Secondly, the term "social work," used throughout the book to describe the CYL's activities, such as promoting youth employment and communicating with informal youth groups, should be questioned. Although it is nice to use the interviewees' own words to reflect their voices, it is important to question terminology in order to interpret the data

1. "截至2017年年底全國共有共青團員8124.6萬名" (*Jiezhi 2017 nian niandi quanguo gongyou gongqing tuanyuan 8,124.6 wan ming*, By the end of 2017, there were 81.246 million Communist Youth League members in China), *Xinhuanet* (新華網), 31 May 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-05/31/c_1122914574.htm (accessed on 15 January 2022).
2. "什麼是群眾工作?" (*Shenme shi qunzhong gongzuo?*, What is mass work?), *Gongchandang yuan wang* (共產黨員網), 12 June 2012, <https://fwu.12371.cn/2012/06/08/ART11339158021384581.shtml> (accessed on 3 January 2022).

and findings. In my opinion, instead of “social work,” it would be more appropriate to describe the CYL’s conduct with the term “mass work” (*qunzhong gongzuo* 群眾工作), which refers to “publicising and educating the masses, respecting and relying on the masses, organising and guiding the masses, improving their ideological and political consciousness, mobilising their enthusiasm and creativity and mobilising them to participate in various work led by the Party.”² Thirdly, in the introductory chapter, the author raises several excellent research questions, such as, “If young people in authoritarian and democratic states alike chose to abstain from official politics, can the causes of their apathy be similar or, at least, comparable?” (p. 23). Such questions are academically interesting and meaningful. However, without first-hand empirical data from comparative countries, aiming to demonstrate that the analytical relevance of this research exceeds the Chinese context of youth politics and policies is a bit too ambitious. It would be more appropriate to leave the broader comparative question to further research.

In sum, in a context with very few empirical studies on the evolution of the CYL in contemporary China, the publication of Tsimonis’s book is an important milestone in the field. As Tsimonis points out in the concluding chapter, young people in China and in the West may share common problems under a “juniority” status from a broader global perspective; therefore, empirical comparative studies focusing on specific states would be a potential avenue for further research.

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